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Afghanistan Situation Report

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22 July 1985

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AFGHANISTAN SITUATION REPORT

CONTENTS

25X1

INSURGENT DEFECTIONS ON THE INCREASE

1 25X1

The increasing number of defections from insurgent groups to the Afghan regime reflects a variety of problems within the insurgency.

25X1

SOVIET MORALE AND HEALTH PROBLEMS

2 25X1

Morale and health among Soviet troops in Afghanistan remains poor, despite efforts by the Soviet government to provide suitable rewards and improve health conditions.

25X1

3 25X1

PERSPECTIVE

THE IMPACT OF THE AFGHAN REFUGEES ON PAKISTAN

4 25X1

More than 2 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan could create increasing problems for Islamabad in the future, but so far the government has successfully managed the situation.

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This document is prepared weekly by the Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis and the Office of Soviet Analysis. Questions or comments on the issues raised in the publication should be directed to [redacted] (secure) or [redacted] (secure).

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INSURGENT DEFECTIONS ON THE INCREASE

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Insurgent groups have been defecting to the Afghan
regime at an increasing rate this year,

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Comment: The increasing number of insurgent defections
reflects several problems confronting the insurgency.
Some groups defect to gain an opportunity for resupply
and respite from the fighting--but often rejoin the
resistance after a few months. Most of the defections
[redacted] are smaller groups from Pashtun

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SOVA M 85-10135CX

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[REDACTED]

areas, where local rivalries are strong. Moreover, Soviet and Afghan intelligence services continue to exploit local insurant differences through bribery and spreading rumors. [REDACTED]

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The high proportion of Gulbuddin's commanders among the defectors probably is a result of their recent losses of territory in battles with other insurgent bands. Outside support for Gulbuddin has been declining, and his commanders--disadvantaged as a consequence--are probably suffering from retaliation by neighboring bands that Hizbi Islami earlier tried to dominate. [REDACTED]

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Paradoxically, defections may increase as insurgent cooperation improves. As the more dominant organizations gradually extend their influence, bands that are unwilling to share local authority and resources may decide to side with the regime for a promise of local autonomy. [REDACTED]

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SOVIET MORALE AND HEALTH PROBLEMS [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] morale among Soviet soldiers in Afghanistan remains poor. [REDACTED] the troops are demoralized by the Afghan Army's lack of desire to fight. Ill health also is contributing to the Soviet soldiers' demoralization, with a Soviet regiment in the Kabul area suffering a 30 percent mortality rate from illnesses brought on by poor health and sanitation practices. Steps to improve morale sometimes are backfiring; financial rewards or honors given to soldiers for each wound or trauma are causing a steady rise in the number of self-inflicted wounds. Meanwhile, [REDACTED] Soviet troops are carrying out counterproductive, cruel acts against Afghans. [REDACTED]

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Comment: [REDACTED] morale and health care continue to be significant problems for the Soviets. [REDACTED] a common perception in the Soviet Union that fighting and living conditions in Afghanistan are poor. (C)

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23 July 1985
NESA M 85-10155CX
SOVA M 85-10135CX

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25X1

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PERSPECTIVE

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THE IMPACT OF THE AFGHAN REFUGEES ON PAKISTAN

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The influx of over two million Afghan refugees has produced little conflict or disruption in Pakistan so far, but several issues could cause problems over the long term. Pakistanis increasingly fear that most refugees will never return to Afghanistan and are concerned about them as a growing source of political and economic competition. In addition, refugees are straining municipal services.

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Refugee Flight

Afghan refugees, currently the largest refugee group in the world, fled to Pakistan in three stages, each corresponding to political events in Afghanistan.

- After Prime Minister Daoud overthrew King Zahir Shah in 1973, a few hundred Afghans--mostly Islamic fundamentalists persecuted by Daoud--fled to Peshawar where they obtained limited political support from the Bhutto government.
- A half million Afghans--including many intellectuals, university professors, and upper level bureaucrats--fled after Taraki's coup in April 1978.
- More than 2 million Afghans fled after the Soviet invasion in December 1979.

Most of the refugees are Pashtuns who moved into Pashtun areas of Pakistan--the tribal areas and regions close to the Afghan/Pakistani border. The 2500-kilometer-long, largely undemarcated border has little meaning for the Pashtun tribes on both sides. Before the Soviet invasion, approximately 75,000 Afghans belonging to nomadic Pashtun tribes traditionally migrated from the mountains of Afghanistan in the summer to the warm Indus plain in the winter.

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NESA M 85-10155CX
SOVA M 85-10135CX

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The Refugee Population

Estimates of the number of Afghan refugees now in Pakistan vary widely. The Pakistani Government claims almost 2.9 million registered refugees plus as many as 200,000 unregistered [redacted] the number to be considerably lower; the World Food Program estimates 1.7 million in the camps. [redacted]

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Pakistan finds its higher estimates helpful because international aid is based on head count. A larger number also helps to dramatize the refugee problem.

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As refugees increase, so do problems. Land in Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) is being used up, and Pakistan is attempting to shift some refugees away from the border, particularly to Punjab Province. In addition to decreasing refugee concentrations, redistribution lessens potential local hostility and limits proximity to the border, which invites incursion by Afghan Government or Soviet forces into Pakistan. Redistribution also eases distribution of services. [redacted]

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The redistribution has gone slowly so far. By mid-1984 fewer than 100,000 registered refugees were in the Punjab. The Afghans, many of them used to cool summers in the mountains, do not want to move to the hot Indus plain. They also want to be close to the border since many return home periodically to farm or fight. [redacted]

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Refugees and Ethnic Politics

The Afghan refugees complicate ethnic problems that have been a significant obstacle to Pakistan's stability since the founding of the country, but Punjabi concerns about resurgent Pushtun nationalism appear exaggerated. Afghan and Pakistani Pushtuns have significantly different views on Pushtun nationalism. Afghan Pushtun nationalists want to free Pushtun territory from Pakistan--the Pushtunistan issue; Pakistani Pushtun nationalists are more concerned with economic issues with Islamabad. [redacted]

25X1

23 July 1985
NESA M 85-10155CX
SOVA M 85-10135CX

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Numbers belie the ethnic threat as well. The refugees increase the number of Pashtuns in Pakistan about 9 percent--less than a 1 percent increase in the overall Pakistani population. Moreover, the Afghans have largely stayed out of Pakistani regional politics.

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Ethnic tensions are more of a problem in Baluchistan, where the Baluch tribes have made demands for greater provincial autonomy. The Baluch have long resented Pashtun domination; Quetta, the capital of Baluchistan, was heavily Pashtun even before the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. Most refugees arriving since then have been Pashtuns, and they may now be in the majority.

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Socio-Economic Issues

Some Pakistani officials fear that Afghans in the refugee camps are developing a "welfare" mentality. Conditions in the camps, while not up to Western standards, are good by local Pakistani standards, and the refugees in the camps almost certainly have greater access to medical and educational facilities than in Afghanistan.

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The Government of Pakistan and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have stressed projects to employ the refugees, but these also raise Pakistani concerns. Some Pakistanis believe economically active refugees are less likely to return to Afghanistan and that every Afghan employed takes a job away from a Pakistani. Islamabad and the UNHCR have emphasized self-contained refugee projects that provide work, divert energies, provide self-sufficiency, and neither take jobs from local Pakistanis nor encourage refugees to put down roots. Such projects include truck farming, growing vegetables for seed, and carpet weaving, which most of the refugees lack skills or interest to perform.

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Attempts to keep the refugees out of the local Pakistani economy are probably too little and too late. A UNHCR survey done in refugee camps in a district near Peshawar found 72 percent of the adult males had some type of employment that brought in wages, and 87 percent of the families had at least one wage earning member.

25X1

23 July 1985
NESA M 85-10155CX
SOVA M 85-10135CX

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Afghan refugees are integrating themselves into the Pakistani economy, particularly in the service sector. Upward of 60,000 Afghan refugee families are supported by the motorized transport business in the NWFP and elsewhere in Pakistan; many of the refugees brought trucks with them. Pakistan, with a shortage of trucks, registered these vehicles. The Afghans have also established small retail shops and are gaining a foothold in the bazaars of Peshawar and Islamabad.

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Competition for jobs in Pakistan could become an acute problem if the numbers of Pakistani men working abroad declines significantly. Since 1983, job opportunities--particularly in the Middle East where most of the approximately 3.5 million Pakistanis working abroad have gone--have been falling. Pakistan's wage scale, inflated by migration, is likely to be depressed, and cheap Afghan labor adds to the potential for depressed wages.

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Municipal services of cities affected most by the refugees are stretched to the limit. The refugees--who are disproportionately represented by the elderly, young children, and women of childbearing age--have increased pressure on medical services; availability of water is a critical problem; and buses are full.

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Outlook

The Afghan refugees pose more potential problems--economic, ethnic, and political--than actual problems for Pakistan. There has been little violence, few outbreaks of disease, and almost no starvation. We believe that the Pakistanis, with continued support from the international community, will continue to be able to keep the situation from becoming a crisis.

25X1

23 July 1985
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